

# *Farmshine*

## **'White Gold' boosts a higher standard!**

### **They've moved away from water tasting milk**

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**Special for Farmshine**

**Friday December 12, 2014**

East Earl, Pa. – Emblazoned with red-white-and blue seals proclaiming “100% U.S.A.” and “Highest National Standard,” the *White Gold* brand of milk sold by Family Dairy farms, LLC, was a focal point on the busy Saturday before Thanksgiving at the Shady Maple Market foyer here in eastern Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

The fact that East Earl resident Dave Zimmerman – recently elected State Representative of Pennsylvania’s 99<sup>th</sup> district – was also on hand, was a bonus for shoppers.

But not all Shady Maple shoppers are local. In fact , the grocery and smorgasboard complex is a Lancaster County icon – drawing both tourists and regulars from the greater Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York metropolis.

“We wanted to showcase our premium milk at a premium location,” Mike Eby of Gordonville, Pa. “We wanted to be in the best spot in Lancaster County, so we are starting here and letting others see the possibilities.”

Within just the first two hours of the day-long *White Gold* give-away on Saturday, November 22, local dairy royalty had gone through 20 cases of single-serve chugs, and many of the folks receiving one already knew this is the place to buy what one person called “the good stuff” – that is, milk sold in Pennsylvania that is bottled at California’s state-mandated higher-solids standard.

Since its inception just one year ago in December of 2013, Eby notes that close to 50,000 gallons of White Gold milk have been given away via promotion and to Food Banks.

“White Gold skim and reduced fat milks have less fat, but more protein than other brands. The milk is smooth and has more flavor because we are bottling under the

California standards,” Eby explained, adding the nickel-sized 100% U.S.A. trademark is hard to miss and gives consumers confidence when buying dairy products.

“When we remove the fat, we add nonfat solids so we’re putting more milk in the milk,” Eby explained. Currently, the milk is bottled at DFA’s Dairy Maid Dairy plant in Fredrick, Maryland, and the solids nonfat used to fortify the milk after fat is removed, comes from milk powder produced at the nearby Maryland-Virginia balancing plant in Laurel, Maryland.

Much of the milk originally comes from Lancaster County farms, including Amish farms, whether they ship to Maryland-Virginia, Lanco, DFA or any other cooperative delivering to Dairy Maid Dairy.

“That is one of the neat things. Consumers like that it taste better, has more protein and is a local product. Dairy farmers benefit because we are utilizing milk and powder right off the market,” Eby explains.

Dave Zimmerman is part of the team, saying he got involved in the Family Dairy Farms, LLC last year after seeing the sad state of affairs in the school lunch program nationally and locally. He also knows firsthand how important dairy farms are to the Pennsylvania economy.

“Everywhere I go, kids are not drinking milk because they say it taste terrible. If we don’t do something, we’re going to be losing a whole generation of milk drinkers,” he said during an interview at the Shady Maple event. “The idea of taking the fat out of everything leaves kids with food they don’t like and won’t eat. With *White Gold*, we’re getting the flavor of milk back in so the kids will want to drink milk again.”

Current National School Lunch regulations prohibit the sale of whole milk at school because food service directors must map protein, calories and other nutrient requirements. While *White Gold* skim milk costs about 50 cents per gallon more to produce, the benefits include more protein for a more nutrient dense serving – without the fat the National School Lunch program is regulating.

Dave’s son, Shawn Zimmerman, is also part of the *White Gold* team, doing graphics and marketing, Priscilla Eberly does the books, and local Amish dairy producer John King of Quarryville represents the Amish community that has joined Dairy Pricing Association to help fund the fortification costs in this California standards milk production and promotion effort here in Pennsylvania’s “Garden Spot.”

“We’re not trying to re-invent the wheel,” says Eby. “We are following California’s lead on this by doing something that is already proven to be the premier standard set by the state of California and showing how it can work in the market elsewhere.”

Since 1962, the state of California has, by law, processed milk to higher standards. The California standards are referred to in the dairy industry as “putting more milk in the milk.” What this means is when fat is removed, more of milk’s natural nonfat solids are added. Specifically, the California standards are for Whole milk to be standardized to 3.5% fat (not 3.25), 8.75 solids (not 8.25).

In addition, when processing milk to the lower fat levels of 2%, 1% and skim, Eby explains that “a void is created by removing fat. That void is taste.”

Under the California standards, the *White Gold* 2% milk has its void restored by adding 2 more grams of protein. The 1% fat milk has 11 grams of protein, and the skim *White Gold* milk is solids-restored with 9 grams of protein.

“In California, this protein is extracted from milk by a reverse osmosis process and equipment,” Eby explains. So in California where this processing method is done by law, the plant efficiency is key by keeping this protein in liquid form using reverse osmosis.

“Unfortunately the rest of the country has not kept up with this technology. So, for most of us in the other 49 states who want to follow the California milk standards, the only option when fortifying is to use solids nonfat,” he continues. California’s cost to fortify is 16-20 cents a gallon, where for us when dealing with solids nonfat, the additional cost averages 50 cent per gallon.”

Dairy Pricing Association (DPA) pays the fortification cost of the *White Gold* milk, and the product buy-back giveaways to Food Banks. The producer-funded DPA originated in Wisconsin and now has a following of dairy farmers in southern Pennsylvania.

Area dairy farmers, most of them Amish producers, learned about DPA through the National Dairy Producers Organization, based in California, when NDPO held a farmer meeting in southern Pa. a few years ago. Eby serves on the NDPO Board and is currently running to represent his region as a Land O’Lakes delegate. The Eby dairy farm has held membership in Land O’Lakes for four generations.

Dairy Pricing Association ([www.dairypricing.org](http://www.dairypricing.org)) is funded through a voluntary 10-cent/cwt checkoff used toward efforts that help raise the farm level price of milk by buying dairy commodities off the market and giving dairy products away

to the less fortunate, as well as this *White Gold* project that uses milk powder in the California standards fortification process – all with the purpose of helping to maintain a milk supply level that meets consumer demand without depressing farm milk prices.

“When someone drinks *White Gold* for the very first time and asks the question, ‘Why doesn’t all milk taste like this?’ I feel we have done exactly what we set out to do,” Eby relates. “I am convinced people are not ready to listen to what you have to say until they have asked a question. Giving them this milk that is different, makes them ask the question. Now we have ears to hear the message.”

*White Gold* milk giveaway promotions – at sporting events and at Shady Maple, where it is sold in the dairy case – “allows the Dairy Princesses to talk about milk and get into the science of milk protein, that milk is a product that is part of a healthy lifestyle,” Eby notes.

*White Gold* is currently packaged as Whole, 2%, 1% and skim. Flavored varieties are not available.

“In the beginning we did all four types of *White Gold* unflavored milk to prove we could do them all,” he adds. “Now that we’ve added retail sales to the Food Bank donations, it’s difficult to make all four in the 1000-gallon minimum quantity each day, so we have been focusing on the most popular milk variety – the 2%. We want to do it right and grow from there. We don’t want to grow beyond our ability to serve.”

A batch of *White Gold* whole milk is also made each week, and Shady Maple uses that in all of their cooking at their famous smorgasbord. Shady Maple President Elwood Martin says it makes their dishes even better. People can taste the difference because instead of 3.25% fat, it is 3.5% and protein is added for total solids of 8.75%.

“I approached this at first with some trepidation,” Martin admitted in a phone interview while he was in Buffalo, New York, right before Thanksgiving, shoveling snow from rooftops. “But Family Dairy Farms has done a great job with the promotions. I have been very impressed. The milk has a richer taste and our overall dairy case sales have increased. I can hardly wait for it to become available in the bags to serve at the beverage bar in the restaurant.

Eby says everyone involved in the *White Gold* milk realizes that. “In order for a new product to get off the ground, margins must drop and on conveniences are part of the early equation.”

He explains that the DFA-owned Dairy Maid Dairy plant puts up with the hassle of processing just 1000 gallons of *White Gold* while doing their current high-volume plant processing of 100,000 gallons of fluid milk a day. Shady Maple is willing to sell the milk at the state-mandated minimum without adding markup. And farmer member organization, through Dairy Pricing Association, buy excess batch proceeds of *White Gold* to donate to Food Banks.

“This is an example of all working together to provide quality to the consumer at no additional cost,” says Eby. “I call it raising the bar. It all starts with relationships and knowing how to get people in the same room to work together.”

The long term goal is to increase the sliding Class I fluid milk sales by bringing flavor back to the fat-skimming void.

“*White Gold* is out to change the system and challenge the way we think about milk,” he states.

Asked what is rewarding about this endeavor, Eby replies; “My favorite story was when a farmer accused us of filling an empty *White Gold* bottle with raw milk prior to taste test. The farmer was convinced it was the milk from his home farm cows. But *White Gold* milk is pasteurized and homogenized, yet it taste like it came straight from the milk-house tank. This is what we are after. We have got to get away from that watery tasting milk.”

“Soy and almond juice is more than willing to pick up the market share we as a dairy industry are willing to let it slip out of our hands,” Eby says emphatically. “Kids are our No.1 target audience, which is why *White Gold* milk needs to be in schools.” He is currently in conversation with three superintendents from three school districts.

Zimmerman stresses that is the whole idea: “To serve 1% milk that meets the regulation but tastes like whole milk. That is the concept.”

“It will happen,” Eby stresses. “1% fat milk, 11 grams protein, 40% calcium (8oz) milk will be in schools, and it will be in plastic bottles paid for by farmer organizations. These are our mouths to lose. How many other products get a free shot at capturing a market share like milk has in schools? And we blow it by allowing warm, watery, cardboard tasting, less than desirable milk to be served. To that, we are saying: “No more!”

In addition to Shady Maple, *White Gold* is also available at the Honey Brook IGA and at two farmers markets in York and Columbia.

